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LETTER HOME FROM V CORPS CAPTAIN LEADS TO SUPPORT FOR HUNDREDS OF DEPLOYED TROOPS

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18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs Office

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- What started with a simple letter home from a V Corps military police officer in Iraq has blossomed into a support network for hundreds of deployed Soldiers.

During the first iteration of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Nancy Simioni read a letter from her niece, Capt. Sara Mann, about three Soldiers who never received mail and were in need of support. Mann was deployed to Baghdad at the time with the corps' 18th Military Police Brigade.

Simioni was touched by the letter and eager to help. She asked for the Soldiers' names and addresses and began sending them candy and cheerful notes of support.

News spread rapidly around Simioni's workplace, and soon several of her co-workers at General Motors Corporation joined in, sending Soldiers cards and donating small



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Shortly after their arrival in Iraq for their second deployment, Soldiers from V Corps' 18th Military Police Brigade opened stockings donated by General Motors Corporation employees as part of the Aunt Nancy Adopt-a-Soldier project. The project that now supports hundreds of deployed troops started with a letter from one of the brigade's officers to her family at home.

treats.

Soon they began asking about "adopting" deployed Soldiers as well, and Simioni's small gesture rapidly grew into a project beyond her imagination.

During the fall of 2003, Simioni went on a Detroit radio station and encouraged others to send cards and letters to Soldiers during the holidays. Hundreds ojumped at the opportunity to show their support, and each soldier on "Aunt Nancy's" list was "adopted" two and three times over.

As the project bloomed, GM and Harley Davidson employees, veterans, families, scout troops and classrooms from all across the U.S. began writing letters and sending care packages.

The program grew from the other direction as well, as families began sending Aunt Nancy the names of their family and friends in the military. A web site donated to the effort opened up a communication gateway through which troops began submitting their own units for support.

Thus, what began as support for a handful of troops within 18th MP Brigade grew to 10, then 30, and is now a complete support network for more than 600 Soldiers across Iraq and Kuwait. By Christmas 2004 the Aunt Nancy Adopt-a-Soldier Project encompassed more than 1,100 Americans sending support to troops. And it was the second Christmas that GM employees collected decorations and goodies and filled hundreds of stockings for deployed Soldiers.

The 18th is now back in Baghdad. When Aunt Nancy heard about the deployment she contacted Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Graybill, the brigade's Morale, Welfare and Recreation representative, who was with the 18th during its previous deployment. The two got together while Graybill was on leave in the U.S. to plan some holiday cheer for the unit.

Graybill is now the liaison between Simioni and the unit and helps distribute Aunt Nancy's packages. "I'm glad to help and I really enjoy it," said Graybill. "I really feel I'm the right person for the job."

Simioni's says her motivation for the program stems mostly from her teenage years during the Vietnam War and what she viewed as poor treatment and a lack of support for the troops of her generation. She also remembers the stories her father, a World War II veteran, told about how lonely he was during the war.

The e-mails and letters of appreciation she receives from the Soldiers she's helped really keep her going and keep her spirits high, she said.

Preparing for a yearlong deployment, saying goodbye to loved ones, weary from travel, some brigade Soldiers were feeling a little worse for the wear when they arrived in Baghdad. But when the 18th checked in at Camp Victory there were 20 boxes containing 100 Christmas stockings already waiting from Aunt Nancy and her personal army of dedicated helpers.

To participate in the Aunt Nancy Adopt-A-Soldier project, send an e-mail to

nancy@auntnancyusa.com or visit the program's web site at
www.auntnancyusa.com.

